

Letter 1:

I have agreed to edit a volume on "XXX" for a new series called "Oxford Philosophical Concepts" edited by Christia Mercer at Columbia. Obviously the last thing the world needs is another series of companions, handbooks, and guides, but let me emphasize that this is a very different sort of project. The goal is to provide the "prehistory" of a single philosophical concept so that advanced undergrads, grad students, and eggheaded members of the general public can bone up on the history of a concept before doing further work in the contemporary literature. The book will focus on what leads up to the contemporary (roughly 1950 and beyond) discussion of "XXX," without actually going into details.

OUP plans to market these books aggressively in trade paperback format right away, and also have a kind of online version with special links, interdisciplinary material, etc. In addition to "XX" there will be volumes on Efficient Causation, Eternity, Consciousness, Authenticity, Space, Virtue, and many more. You can see the current list as well as other details here: <http://www.columbia.edu/~cm50/opc.htm>

Another thing that sets this series apart is that, in addition to 8-10 long-ish essays (8-10,000 words) by philosophers, we're commissioning "Reflections" (1200 -1400 words) about related issues from non-philosophers and philosophers alike, which will often include illustrations. For example, the volume on Eternity will include a Reflection, written by a musicologist. See examples of Reflections under Models at <http://www.columbia.edu/~cm50/opc.htm>.

The reason I'm writing to you is that I'm wildly enthusiastic about the idea of your writing a longish piece on the topic of "XXX in Ancient Thought" or "XXX in Greek Thought" or something of that ilk for the volume. Let me emphasize that the last thing we're looking for is a comprehensive survey; instead, you could tackle the assignment any way you liked, focusing on particular issues, particular thinkers, particular historical developments, whatever seemed to you interesting and worth doing. What I really want is good philosophers doing something genuinely interesting that addresses some central questions like:

The tentative time line is as follows: I'd like to arrange a casual work-in-progress workshop with our eight main authors in early 2011, though the precise date is still up in the air. The final submission deadline would be summer 2011. So that gives you about 18 months to write a 8-10,000 word piece.

I'm sure you have a lot on your plate, but it should be an interesting and fun project. I would really love to have you involved and obviously think the volume would be much the better for your contribution.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions.

Letter 2:

[This is a version of Letter 1, but employs the strategy (which has proven successful) of getting a couple authors on-board and then mentioning them as an encouragement to others.]

I'm sorry to contact you rather out of the blue, but I have a hopefully tempting invitation for you.

I am proposing to edit a volume entitled "XX" for a new series called "Oxford Philosophical Concepts" edited by Christia Mercer at Columbia. This will be a collective volume written by six or seven authors, of whom I have already identified four: myself, YY (Pittsburgh), ZZ (Harvard), and VV (Warwick).

Obviously the last thing the world needs is another series of companions, handbooks, and guides, so before I go any further let me emphasize that this is a very different sort of project. The goal of the series is to provide the history of single philosophical concepts so that advanced undergrads, grad students, and sophisticated members of the general public can acquire a deeper understanding of this topic before doing further work in the contemporary literature. In the case of this volume, we would be producing something that, even by the standard of this very interesting series, is innovative and new. At least I don't know of any book that addresses the concept of XX both philosophically and historically, spanning from the ancient to the medieval period. (See further below on the structure of the book.)

OUP plans to market these books aggressively in trade paperback format right away, and also have a kind of online version with special links, interdisciplinary material, etc. In addition to "XXX" there will also be volumes on Efficient Causation, Consciousness, Sympathy, Evil, Authenticity, Space, Virtue, and many more. You can see the current list as well as other details here: <http://www.columbia.edu/~cm50/opc.htm>

The reason I'm writing to you is that I'm wildly enthusiastic about the idea of your writing a longish piece on the topic of "XXX in Ancient Thought" or "XXX in Greek Thought" or something of that ilk for the volume. Let me emphasize that the last thing we're looking for is a comprehensive survey; instead, you could tackle the assignment any way you liked, focusing on particular issues, particular thinkers, particular historical developments, whatever seemed to you interesting and worth doing. What I really want is good philosophers doing something genuinely interesting that addresses some central questions like: WW, ZZ, RR. For instance I will be doing XX in the medieval philosophical tradition, and will be emphasizing especially the use of the notion of XX in YYYYYY. My piece will be complemented by a chapter by ZZZ, who has agreed to discuss conceptions of XX in late

medieval texts. For the ancient period, as I say, I've already secured the agreement of RRR.

I started by getting the ancient and medieval sections settled, simply because this is the area where I myself have expertise. Now I'm moving on to inviting authors for the "modern" section and am starting by asking you.

The tentative time line is as follows: funding permitting, I will run a work-in-progress workshop with all main authors in London, probably in spring 2011. The final submission deadline would be summer 2011, though this is negotiable. I think the length should be about 10,000 words, maybe somewhat less.

I know you are bound to be extremely busy, but you are uniquely appropriate to join this project, and I would be very glad to have you involved. Please let me know if I can answer any questions if it would help you decide.

Letter 3:

I'm writing to invite you to contribute an article to an exciting new series of edited books called *Oxford Philosophical Concepts* (series editor, Christia Mercer). Volumes will include *Eternity, Time, Evil, Space, Soul, Pride, Sympathy*, and the like. I will be serving as editor for a volume called *XXX*, and I would very much like to have you involved in the project. Before you consider it, let me tell you a little bit about this new series because it is a bit unlike most other series out there in the history of philosophy. The *OPC* volumes are intentionally **not** supposed to amount to yet another *Companion to X* or *Handbook to Y* or *Philosophical Encyclopedia*. They will differ along the following lines:

1. The *OPC* volumes will offer "opinionated histories" of the life of a given philosophical concept. In the case of the *XX* volume in particular, what I do **not** want is simply a chronological survey of philosophical analyses of consciousness from Plato to Dennett. I'm starting with the idea that, historically, *XX* has been served to address the following sorts of questions:

2. The *OPC* volumes are meant to be useful to scholars across disciplinary fields and periods. One of the motivating thoughts behind the series is that scholars in disciplines like history of art, history of science, history of literature, etc., and scholars of different time periods and geographical areas, often come across key philosophical concepts without much of an idea what philosophical issues made them matter at a given place and time. The aim of these volumes is to make clear *what all the fuss was about* concerning the concept in different places, times, and traditions. *What debates is the concept of*

consciousness caught up in? What turns on having this or that analysis or understanding of it? What are the options? What are the constraints (philosophical, empirical, theological, moral) on an analysis of consciousness?

3. The OPC volumes will have some unusual features: images and short “Interdisciplinary Reflections.” Because (a) we want to make the volumes accessible to scholars across fields; (b) we think philosophers have something to learn from scholars in other fields; (c) we want to contextualize our abstract philosophical concepts; and (d) we want these books to be fun to read and visually engaging, we will include more than just philosophical essays in the volumes. We plan to intersperse throughout the volume a selection of short (1000-1200 word essays) by historians of art, music, science, literature, religion, philosophers working on less studied cultures, etc. In most cases, these will be motivated by the material in a chapter and contribute to our understanding of the role of the concept in the period or tradition under discussion. In some cases, they may just offer a point of contrast (e.g., consciousness in the Buddhist tradition or among medieval Christian mystics or the rise of perfumery and its link with conceptions of olfaction). In most cases we expect these short essays to include illustrations, images and reproductions. We really do want to make these volumes fun to read and even peruse.

4. The OPC volumes will have extensive back matter including (a) a section on *Future Study* listing chief historical options left out of the main body of the volume and where to find them; (b) a *Lexicon* acknowledging the important fact that a concept has its role within a semantic web that changes over time; and (c) *Bibliographies* and *Indices* to assist scholars and increase user-friendliness.

5. The OPC volume production will include at least one workshop that will bring together the philosophers writing the chapters and also the scholars writing the “Interdisciplinary Reflections.” The aim of the workshops is both to share our ideas and, with luck, to produce a more unified volume than can be expected if everyone is working entirely on his or her own. The volume is meant to be, as much as possible, **not just a collection but an integrated story**. We think that through workshops we will not only all have a better understanding of where our chapters fit into the big picture, but also may be able to standardize terminology somehow. Plus we think they’ll be a lot of fun. I myself would like to have one workshop *before* we have complete drafts of the essays and another one once we all have drafts.

At the moment I want to work with the contributors to iron out the precise topics of each chapter, but here is a very tentative list of possibilities to give you a sense for the sort of volume I am envisioning. Not all of these will make it to the final volume. Others will surely be added. And those of these that remain will change. But this should give you a ballpark idea of what I’m looking for. I’d welcome your suggestions.